Dads and Lads

Text, Jeremiah 3:4.

Notes

IN THE second and part of the third chapters of the book of Jeremiah, the weeping prophet pictures his people's life as a nation. Beginning at the dawning of their early days, in the simple piety and uncorrupted life of the desert, Israel had been true to God, and her devotion to her Divine Spouse had been rewarded by Divine guidance and protection. But as conquerors, they soon learned to adopt the customs of the conquered, including those of their religions, which were usually those of licentious merriment at their sacrifices and festivals. Now after many years they have lost all of their religious fervor, and on every hilltop is to be seen the evidences of her sinful dalliance with the false gods; so in her eagerness to consort with their heathenish practices Jeremiah pictures Israel as a sinful woman looking for her paramours by the wayside, or an Arab lying in wait for the unwary traveler in the desert. Repulsive and far-fetched as these comparisons seem to be to us, we must remember that the ideas and the customs of the times made them seem to be very appropriate. The practice of the worship of the gods of Canaan involved the practice of the foulest impurities; and by her revolt from Jehovah, Israel became a harlot in fact as well as figure.

As a punishment for these grave offences, "the showers were withholden, and the spring rains fell not," but the merciful purpose of this divine chastisement was not fulfilled; the people were not stirred to penitence, but were rather hardened in their sins, "but thou hast a harlot's forehead, thou refusest to be made ashamed!" And now the day of grace is past, and repentance comes too late. My Father, Thou art the Guide of my youth?"

For our purpose today, let us take away this clause from its context and place it in more beautiful surroundings, forgetting the sadness of the old prohet. There is nothing on earth so sacred as home, and when that home has within it the true relationships of children and parents, then that sacredness is enhanced many fold. We can then see how applicable these words are to the early life of the boy and his earthly father. Listen to what these words say, "My Father, thou art the guide of my youth." Is this true? Does every boy whose father is living use that father's life as a guide and example? Ask the boy if what his dad does is not pretty nearly right? There is hardly a boy but what will think that his dad is not far wrong. And not only does the boy copy his dad, but there are some things which perhaps the boy has learned are not right, but his dad does them, so he at once feels that the things are not quite as bad as they are made out, and ultimately weakens his resistance to that temptation when it comes. That old music hall song, "I'm following my father's footsteps, I'm following dear old dad," is only too true. If the dad is directing his footsteps wrongly, it may be certain that, but for the intervention of Divine grace, calamity of some sort will fall to the lot of the boy.

A story was told recently in a popular magazine that a business man gave to his son as a Christmas present a piece of paper on which was written: "To my dear son: I give to you one hour of each week day and two hours of my Sunday to be yours, to be used as you want it without intereference of any kind whatsoever." In explaining how he came to reach the decision to give that present, the father said that he was seated one day in his office when a human derelict came in to see him and when he mentioned his name the business man said, "Lad, to see you like this—and you with such a father!" The young man replied: "Well, I have often heard that he was a fine man. All his friends have said so. I never knew him. He was so much occupied with his business and with his associations that I only saw him occasionally at meals. I never knew him!" This set the business man to thinking and he determined to concentrate his own time on making his boy know him. This story could be verified in the experience of many communities.

The welfare of the boy requires that his father be more interested in his son than in his business, pleasure, or ambition; and that his mother be more attached to him than to society, to poodle dogs, or to Teddy bears. Personal attention is indispensable to the boy's well-being. The incubating process is too much in vogue in various homes. The "brooder" may be economical for raising fowls, which are only for commercial purposes; but a domestic brooder is a sorry substitute for real motherhood in raising children, in regard to whom not only life but character and eternal destiny are involved.

A great snowstorm came on a prairie in Minnesota, and a farmer in a sleigh was lost. He traveled on and after a while struck the tracks of another sleigh, which made him feel satisfied to go on, seeing that he had found the trail of another traveler. He hurried on till he heard the sound of sleighbells and then catching up with his predecessor called out, "Where are you going?" "I don't know, I am following another fellow's trail," was the reply. The fact was that they were both lost, and were traveling round and round in a circle in one another's tracks. Then they talked the matter over, and, looking up, saw the North Star and towards the north was their home, so they started straight for it and were safe.

A great responsibility rests upon fathers! they dare not ignore their God given position. Judge Alton B. Parker and his favorite grandson, five years old, narrowly escaped drowning in the Hudson river. For half an hour the two played in the water. Then Judge Parker took the boy for a swim into deep water. Placing the boy on his back, he swam around for a while and then deciding to float, turned over, seating the boy on his chest. In this manner, the Judge floated a distance from the wharf before noticing it. Then he attempted to turn over, intending to swim for the shore. In the effort to transfer the little fellow to his back, the boy got frightened, and tightly clasped the Judge by the neck. He called on the boy to let go, but the child only held on more tightly, and frightened at the evident distress of the Judge, began to whimper. In a few moments the grasp of the boy became so tight that Judge Parker could not breathe. He tried to shake

the boy loose, and then attempted to break his grasp. The boy held on with the desperation of death, however, and every effort of the Judge only plunged them both beneath the choking waves. With his last few remaining breaths Judge Parker gave up the struggle and shouted for assistance. The mistake that the distinguished man made was that he went too far from the shore with the boy. There are too many men today who are doing the same thing. They are going too far in social life, they are too lax on the question of amusements, they are too thoughtless on the subject of dissipation. Some day they will stop, but the boys will be gone.

When John Paton, who afterwards became the great missionary, was leaving home, there lay before him a walk of about forty miles. His father walked with him for about six miles, and then they parted. The father and son loved each other dearly, and the parting scene was full of sorrow sweetened by deep affection. "God bless you, my son! your father's God prosper you and keep you from all evil," said the tenderhearted father. After going some distance John climbed a high piece of ground to see if his father was still watching him. At the same moment his father climbed the dyke to see his boy. John watched him climb down. "I watched," he said, "through blinding tears, till his form faded from my gaze; and then hastening on my way, vowed deeply and oft, by the help of God, to live and act so as never to grieve or dishonor such a father and a mother as He had given me."

Not long ago a prisoner brought an awful accusation against his father, who was a very eminent lawyer. When asked if he remembered his father, the prisoner said: "Perfectly; whenever I entered his presence he said, 'Run away, my lad, and don't trouble me'." By keeping his boy from "troubling" him the great lawyer was able to complete his famous work on "The Law of Trusts," but his son in due time became a practical illustration of the most sacred of all trusts violated.

Every man who has on his heart the responsibilities of his parenthood naturally asks "What are the best means by which I may truly fulfill my responsi-

bilities?" May we note several requisites without which no father can maintain his God given position:

I. HE MUST BE A CHRISTIAN. A man rode along a country road with his little boy some time ago. He found out that the boy was talking to his friends just like his father spoke to them. A man noticed it and said, "It is amusing, isn't it?" So it was, but it is more than amusing. The boy will speak as the father speaks, will walk as the father walks, and may God help the man who seeks to speak and to walk in such a way that the boy will speak and walk right like him. The boy notices all that dad is doing or has done. Yet while the lad will glory in the father's physical or mental attainments, and will say little about the father's spiritual life, that is the part which influences and counts the most. There is no place where a man's religion is so valuable as in his own home. Many a man appears to be religious on Sunday, but if we could see him at home, at the table or when he loses his temper over some trivial thing, we do not wonder that his religious influence over the boys is not very strong. And it would not do him any good to talk to the boys about becoming Christians. A man in Iowa had been storming at his family, especially at his poor wife, one day, until he had spoiled the pleasure of everything in that home for that day at least. Then he went out, slamming the door behind him. The boy stood off to one side listening to it all. He looked into his mother's face and tearful eyes, and coming across the room, took hold of her hands and said: "Mother, we made an awful mistake when we married father, didn't we?"

"My father, thou art the guide of my youth." And the father who has Jesus Christ as his guide will have no fear of guiding his boy along the pathway of right living. We sometimes find the children of good fathers going along the wrong way, and wonder how it has happened. Jesus said, "By their fruits ye shall know them." When the seed is sown we expect it to produce the kind of fruit which is natural to it. Sow an acorn and the oak will inevitably follow; sow corn and corn will result; sow seeds of Christianity in the boy's life and the fruits will be as the seed that is sown. The only reason why boys of good parents go astray lies

in the fact that the right kind of seed was not the dominating factor in the boy's makeup, and the seeds of sin entering in crowded out those of goodness and right ideals. There is no alternative. However, the parent is not always in a position to be assured that the seeds sown in the lad's life are the right kind. School, with its varied associations; playmates, with their differing home life; the habits and customs of other men and women; the many inducements lying along the way of life towards evil; all of them may undo the careful seedsowing and training of the Chrisian father. When there is no Christian influence on the part of the parent, all these forces have unlimited sway, and the wonder is, not that so many boys go wrong, but that so few of them really turn out to be bad characters.

II. But not only must the father have become a Christian himself; HE MUST BE A MAN OF PRAYER. The job we are trying to do is too big to carry through alone. What is more pathetic than to see a man who has tried to live as God would have him to live facing problems which have come to him through his boys. He does not know what to do and has no one to whom he can turn for help. And even when he has done the best that he can, there are a good many things cropping up which are a source of trial and hurt to him. There is no way by which any man can face the burdens of life or meet its responsibilities properly if he is a stranger to prayer.

Many of us remember the prayers of our fathers for us. Our names were taken to the Lord and His blessing asked on us that we might grow up into manhood, God fearing men and women. Many of those prayers have been answered. And it is safe to say that most of them will be answered. At a family reunion all the boys were gathered together. They began to talk of their dad who had passed away. The oldest one turned to the picture on the wall and said, "Boys, there is the picture of the best father God ever gave to a family. Many a time he has taken me to his secret place of prayer, put his hand on me and prayed for his boy, and at every turn of life, especially since he has gone, I have seemed to feel the pressure of his hand on my head, and have seen the tears on his face and have heard the prayers from his trembling lips. I have

not been as good a man since his death as I ought to have been, but I want to say today to you all and my dear old mother that I am going to try and live just as he would want me to live from this hour." Overcome with emotion he sat down, and the other boys spoke in order much in the same strain. Each one spoke of the place of secret prayer and the father's hand on the head. At last they had all spoken but the youngest boy, who sat with his face bowed in his hands and was sobbing, but refused to speak. The oldest turned to him and said, "Buddie, say a word. It will help you and will help us. There is no one here but ourselves." He got up, holding the back of the chair, and said, "It is a long time since father died, but this home is just as sacred a place as it ever was, mother has always kept it as a place of prayer. You are all of you good but me. I am the black sheep in this flock. And yet every step I have wandered away from God and the life of my good old father I have felt his hand on my head and have heard his blessed words of prayer. I am going to come back to God, back to my father's life, so help me God. I will never wander away again."

Those boys could say with the poet:

Life's a better place, it seems,
When you, dad, fill my dreams.
Though there's many a man that's good,
You are better!

Your rules for me were strict,
And frequently you licked
Me just to teach the code right
To the letter.

But it's made me more like you,
And when the game is through,
The books will show, you bet, that
I'm your debtor!

The boy needs love, sympathy, comradeship more than dogmatic teaching. He has a hard path to tread; and will face many unpleasant and unsatisfactory experiences. He cannot be handled with anything but patience and patience is the product of prayer. The

father who does not pray will not have the patience he needs in gaining the love and confidence of his boy.

Harry Lauder, the Scotch comedian, lost his boy on the Marne. He afterwards used his talents in trying to give pleasure and enjoyment to other boys. Speaking of his feelings when the news came to him, he said, "There were three ways open to me—there was the way of suicide; there was the way of drink; there was the way to God. And thank God, that is the way I have chosen." When our hopes are centered in the boy, and we eagerly look for the time when the boy will be a better man than his dad, and the boy is taken from us, what hope is there unless there is a hope which anchors the soul—the way of prayer.

III. And where can we turn to find instruction in the right ways of making lasting friendships with the boys, other than in the WORD OF GOD? There is nothing written which will be as useful as the advice found there. Our fathers were deep and devoted readers of the Bible; we have forgotten that such a book exists. We talk about the "mother's Bible," what we need is the "father's Bible;" a book which will set us on the pathway we need, which will correct our own failings that our example may be true and without mistake.

One summer a family was spending their vacation in the Rocky Mountains. One day while they were out for a stroll they came to a very narrow place in the path; above were high perpendicular walls; below a deep and dangerous canyon; also the path was covered with loose and slippery stones. To insure greater safety, they joined hands. The father took hold of the boy's hand, who then took hold of his sister's, who was held in turn by her mother. As they were about half way across, the little boy said, "Be careful, dad, where you tread, I am walking in your tracks!" If our tracks are made according to the will of God, as we read and study His truth, there will be no danger of taking the wrong road. Do we want to know what are safe amusements, we can find out from Paul's letters; is there a course opening to us about which we have questionings; the teaching of this book will settle for us any question we may have. Fathers, read the book; read the book!

"I scan its pages o'er and o'er,
Its interlinings mark a score
Of promises most potent, sweet,
In verses many on each sheet.
Albeit the gilding dull of age,
And yellow-hued its every page,
No book more precious e'er may be,
Than father's Bible is to me.

Its tear-stained trace fresh stirs my heart,
The corresponding tear to start,
Of trials, troubles herein brought,
For comfort never vainly sought,
Nor help in sorest hour of need,
For love to crown the daily deed:
No book more precious e'er may be,
Than father's Bible is to me."

IV. Of course, it is impossible for any father to have the confidence and trust of his boy unless there is something to justify it. No boy will have faith in his parents unless they place FAITH AND TRUST in him. And this faith and trust are not possible without affection. Let the boy know that his father really loves him, and the boy will love the father in return.

An aged couple in the country toiled late and hard to put their son through the University. He stood at the top of the honor list. On reaching home he took his aged father's hands, and said, "All I am and have won are through your toil and hard work. These hands have made it possible for me to be what I am, and their horniness is more precious to me than heaps of gold."

The father's love is shown in the care and protection placed around the home and the boy's life; in the provisions that are made for his welfare and enjoyment. It will be shown in the acts of unselfishness which are for the boy's benefit; in the foregoing of many pleasures in order that the boy may have a good time; in the desire to give the boy clean, healthful pastimes under the right kind of care and supervision; in the providing for him the means by which the bottled up energies may have a normal outlet; above all

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A certain man had two sons, and the younger of them said to his father: "Father, give me the portion of thy time and thy attention and thy companionship and thy counsel which falleth to me." And he divided unto them his living in that he paid the boy's bills and sent him to a select preparatory school and to dancing school and to college and tried to believe that he was doing his full duty by the boys.

And not many days afterwards the father gathered all his interests and aspirations and ambitions and took his journey into a far country, into a land of stocks and bonds and securities and other things which do not interest a boy; and there he wasted his precious opportunity of being a chum to his own son. And when he had spent the very best of his life and had gained money, but had failed to find satisfaction, there arose a mighty famine in his heart; and he began to be in want of sympathy and real companionship. And he went and joined himself to one of the clubs of the country; and they elected him chairman of the house committee and president of the club and sent him to Congress. And he would fain have satisfied himself with the husks that other men did eat, and no man gave unto him any real friendship.

But when he came to himself he said: "How many men of my acquaintance have boys whom they understand and who understand them, who talk about their boys and seem perfectly happy in their comradeship of their sons, and I perish here with heart hunger? I will arise and go to my son and will say unto him: 'Son, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight; I am no more worthy to be called thy father. Make me as one of thy acquaintances." And he arose and came to his son. But while he was yet afar off, his son saw him and was moved with astonishment; and instead of running and falling on his neck, he drew back and was ill at ease. And the father said unto him: 'Son, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight; I am no more worthy to be called thy father. Forgive me now and let me be your friend.' But the son said: 'Not so; I wish it were possible, but it is too late. There was a time when I wanted companionship and counsel and to know things, but you were too busy. I got companionship and I got the information, but I got the wrong kind; and now, alas! I am wrecked in soul and body; there is no more heart left in me, and there is nothing you can do for me. It is too late, too late, too late'."

Two boys were playing across the street when the father of one of them passed on the other side. The neighbor boy said, "Who is that man?" The reply was, "Oh, he's a man that sleeps at our house." Does your boy think of you only as a roomer in what he calls home? Fortunate is the child that has a true home in which both father and mother presided with equal solicitude and a sense of equal responsibility.

"You must be chums," said a friend to a young banker as he walked down the street with his five-year-old son, and whistling as they went. "Yes, we are chums," was the reply, "when he wants to do anything or go to any place, I sacrifice everything to gratify his wish, if it is the right thing to do. I would rather be in his company than that of any man in town. And after a while I think he will want to sacrifice to go with me fishing or any place I wish to go." If there had been a close friendship between many a father and son, many young lives would have been saved from ruin and disgrace.

There was a widow whose boy had lost the privilege of a father's advice and help. In the summer heat he was taken sick and died. This Shunamite woman sent for the prophet Elisha, who in answer to her call, came willingly. He arrived at the home, went into the chamber of death, but his presence at the home did not change the boy's condition. When the prophet laid his staff upon the body of the dead boy, there was no change, but when he drew near and stretched himself upon the lad, mouth to mouth, heart to heart, hand to hand, then the lad, thrilled by the new life, sat up. So the father whose heart beats with the heart of his boy, whose hand seeks to assert itself in accord with the hand of the boy, will assuredly find a response in the newer and more precious intimacy they enjoy together. Affection must be shown to be known, and many a boy has never known of the depth of the father's love simply because the dad has not wished to show his deeper feelings to the boy .

In the coal mines of Lancashire, a roof caved in. The crowd gathered round clearing out the mass of dirt to get at the men beneath. In the midst of their toil a stalwart gray bearded man strode up to them and said, "Get out of my road." He seized a pick and began working with the strength of ten men. The sweat was soon streaming down his grimy face and some one said, "Let me have the pick." "Get out of the way," he cried, "I have two boys there."

Horace Mann once delivered an address at the opening of an institution built for boys, in the course of which he made the statement that if only one boy were saved from ruin by its means it would be a paying investment for all the cost and care and labor of establishing such an institution as that anywhere in the land.

At the close of the exercises a gentleman rallied Mr. Mann upon his seemingly exaggerated estimate, saying, "Did you not color that a little, when you said that all the expenses and labor would be repaid if it saved only one boy?"

"Not if it were my boy," was the solemn and convincing answer.

A member of a staff of evangelists was making an address to a class of boys and girls. Holding up an egg he asked, "What is this egg good for?" "It is good for food," was the prompt reply. "What else is it good for?" "It may be hatched into a chicken." "Good, now suppose that each one of you imagines yourself to be an egg ready to be hatched, into what occupation, profession, or sphere of life would you like to be hatched?" A dozen hands went up, indicative of a ready response. One said that he wanted to be hatched a doctor, another a lawyer, another a merchant, another a farmer, another an engineer, and so on. Of the girls, one wanted to be hatched a milliner, another a dress maker, and yet another wanted to become the proprietor of an ice cream-parlor and confectionary store. Upon all of these choices the evangelist made appropriate comments, expatiating upon the importance of being faithful in whatever sphere providence has placed us. One little fellow who had hitherto failed to attract the speaker's attention, at last was observed

vigorously waving his hand. "Into what would you like to hatch?" asked the evangelist. "I'm not going to hatch," exclaimed the boy. "Why not?" "Because dad says that I am a bad egg."

V. FINALLY, HAVE RESPECT FOR THE BOYS. A boy is a man in the cocoon—you do not know what he is going to become—his life is big with possibilities.

Every man was a boy—although some of us need to be reminded of the fact. Turn back the hand of time and see "Honest Abe" as a boy of twelve when he had never worn a pair of boots; the lean, lank, yellow, hungry boy, hungry for love, hungry for learning, tramping off through the woods for twenty miles to borrow a book and spelling it out, crouching before the glare of the burning logs. We ride past a field where a boy is ploughing. The lad's hair sticks out through the top of his hat, one suspender holds his pants in place, his form is bony and awkward, brown and bare arms scratched with briars held the plough.

As you pass follow the example of the old Scotch schoolmaster who always took off his hat when he entered the schoolroom, "for," said he, "I do not know who is among my pupils."

Be patient with the boys—you are dealing with the makers of history—be patient with the boys.

A diamond in the rough,
  Is a diamond, sure enough.
For before it ever sparkles
  It has the diamond stuff.

Of course some one must find it,
  Or it never would be found.
And then some one must grind it,
  Or it never would be ground.

But when its found and when it's ground
  And when it's burnished bright,
That diamond's everlastingly
  Just sending out the light.

Oh, teacher in the Sunday School,
Don't say, "I've done enough;"
That worst boy in your class may be
A diamond in the rough.

Let us put fathers instead of teacher and home life instead of Sunday School and give the diamond in the rough the training and care so that the life of the future years may be one of light bearing for the world.

There was a more or less popular song some years ago, the chorus of which asked the question, "What's the matter with father?" The answer was, "He's all right!"

But while the reply may have been satisfactory as far as the song was concerned, it is far from satisfactory as far as the relation goes today between the average father and the average son. Social workers and educators say that father is not "all right," and that there is certainly "something the matter" with many fathers.

In a well-known city the members of a social club spent an evening discussing "their boys." In beginning the discussion the speaker passed around pads and asked each man to think over his week's program and put down the number of hours a day (or a week) he spent with his sons.

It was most enlightening to look over the statements of these men. It may be interesting to try the experiment on yourself. Unless you are above the average, you will find very low numerals on your sheet of paper.

Whatever may be said about the fine and enduring influence of mother in the life of a boy—and surely too much cannot be said—in the case of the growing lad it is the indisputable fact that at the age of 12 years at the latest, if the father isn't on the job, or rather hasn't been on the job, there is danger ahead. The signal shows red!

The public school system of America is a wonderful institution, but it will never take the place of the father, even though fathers give it every opportunity to do so.

Let there be a "Father's Hour" each day when father may have the children for himself, when he can enjoy their viewpoint and when they can expand in his larger experience. He can play with them, walk and talk with them, laugh and study with them—and he will know them.

Then much of the future of America will be solved —its success and well-being will be assured and the sons can shout in boisterous sincerity, "What's the matter with father?" Then the reply will come with full meaning and volume from the police officers and judges, and lawyers and juvenile court workers, and city mothers and legislators and statesmen, and the **sons themselves,** "He's all right!"

Public Speakers Supply
Ridgway, Pa.

Abdullah Yusuf